DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 101 611 HE 006 202

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TITLE	U of M (University of Minnesota) Student Attendance Patterns: The Perspective of a Decade 1964-73. Research Bulletin; Vol. 15, No. 16, January 1975.
INSTITUTION	Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Office for Student Affairs.
PUB DATE	31 Jan 75
NOTE	8p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	*Attendance; *Attendance Patterns; *College Attendance; *College Freshmen; College Students; *Higher Education; Historical Reviews; Research Projects; Universities
IDENTIFIERS	*University of Minnesota

ABSTRACT

An examination of attendance patterns of entering University of Minnesota freshmen over the past ten years indicates a remarkable stability in the percentage rates of student persistence. A comparison with other earlier data indicates that these rates have not changed in half a century even though the mission of the institution and the size of the student population has considerably altered. (Author)

office for student affairs RESEARCH BULLETIN

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ED1016111

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Student Life Studies

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HE 006 202

university of minnesota Volume 15 Number 16 January 31, 1975

U of M Student Attendance Patterns

The Perspective of a Decade 1964-73

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University of Minnesota

Over the past half century, student attendance rates at the University of Minnesota have remained surprisingly stable (Hendricks, 1970) in spite of a marked change in the nature of students and the mission of the University in society. Attempts to systematically follow student attrition (or conversely persistence) rates at the University of Minnesota in the last half century have been hampered by the lack of truly comparable data.

The computerization of student records during the past decade, however, has allowed for a much closer monitoring of many measurable student characteristics including attendance patterns. One annual report generated by the Office of Admissions and Records examines attendance patterns of entering cohorts of freshmen over a five year span of time. The attached tables are a reordering and assemblage of these A & R reports over the past decade. They demonstrate the remarkable stability of attendance which other studies with less than total information have also indicated (see Table 2). Individual life histories cannot be accounted for in such conglomerate statistics, thus this information does not refute the claim that this generation of students tend to drop in and out of school with more frequency than previously.

However, in aggregate form the attendance pattern shown here does not indicate this.

The reader can see, for instance, that in the fall of 1964, 9081 new freshmen enrolled at all schools within the University of Minnesota system. Winter Quarter (the second registration of this cohort) eight percent did not return while one percent changed their colleges of registration. Spring Quarter of that first year 16% did not re-register (we have no way of determining from the data if some staying out the previous quarter did return and took the place of others staying out Spring Quarter). The beginning of the second (sophomore) year (fall of 1965), 30% of the original cohort did not attend, while 6% of those re-registering did so in a different college than the one originally chosen. The sorting out by students of their academic interests and choices has begun.

At the beginning of the third academic year, 46% did not return - at least for that quarter. By the beginning of year four in the fall of 1967 (nominally as seniors) 55% did not return and of the 45% re-registering, a different college has been chosen by 17%. This shift in college of registration usually represents a distinct change of academic choice. However, signigicant numbers have made changes of major within the original college (from psychology to economics, for example, all within CLA), changes which do not appear in the data. Five years later (fall 1969) after originally entering the University in what is usually

socially designated as a four year program, 22% of the original cohorts were still actively participating within the University system as a registered undergraduate student.

While data is available for all colleges within the system, we have selected to present only the four largest units. All figures represent percentages of the total individuals registering fall quarter of the years 1964 through 1973. Scanning the bottom line of each time unit, it is possible to see the rates of non-return at a similar point in a cohort's University career over this past decade.

Of great interest is the fact that 25% of the entrants are still registered at the beginning of the fifth year. Public decision makers, whether they be curriculum planners, financial aid givers or selective service officials, who would insist that a student undergraduate career is typically only of four years duration must become aware of the significant number who, for whatever reason, have a longer span of time in an undergraduate career.

A change of even a single percentage point in these data, as well as the dramatic drop in the total number of entering freshmen each year has for certain purposes significant implications for the institution. We do not purpose to denigrate the importance of such information. However, with a longer perspective and converting absolute numbers to relative percentages one detects what appears to be some homeostatic operation at work.

During the decade these figures cover, significant social, economic and political events took place which have been used at various times to explain differing attendance patterns in higher education. While they may be significant factors in shifts in percentage points at a particular period of time, these events seem to have only short run affects on the overall systemic rates.

This data is limited to the careers of those who remain within the University system as undergraduates. We have no way of knowing, for instance, how many of those listed as "not attending" have in reality transferred to other institutions. This table also does not indicate the number of those receiving baccalaureate degrees continuing as graduate or professional school registrants at the U of M or elsewhere.

In recent years a considerable number of students enter the University system as transfer students. An interesting and important piece of information would be a comparison of entering freshmen attrition rates with those of other than U of M tertiary school experience.

The University's computerized record system did not, until a few years ago, enter information of graduation into the computerized student record systems. Thus we do not know from existing computer data the attrition is due to graduation and that which is simply dropping out of the system.

Bibliography

Hendricks, Glenn L. Study of U of M registration procedures. Office for Student Affairs Research Bulletin, University of Minnesota, 1974, 14 (13)

Table 1

ATTRITION RATES -- U. of M. ENTERING FRESHMEN 1964-73

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COLLEGE	AFNR										GENERAL										IT									
Freshmen	1964	-65	-66	-67	-68	-69	-70	-71	-72	-73	1964	-65	-66	-67	-68	-69	-70	-71	-72	-73	1964	-65	-66	-67	-68	-69	-70	-71	-72	-73
Fall (total number)	524	629	574	508	481	528	540	451	456	443	1648	1462	1369	1243	1086	1107	1084	881	829	788	905	970	766	780	707	826	894	586	463	577
Winter (percentages)																														
Same College	92	92	92	91	90	89	93	90	93	91	87	86	88	86	82	81	79	80	83	80	86	90	91	91	89	93	87	88	90	94
Another	2	2	1	2	3	1	1	1	1	2							1	1			9	5	4	4	5	3	5	3	2	1
Not Attend	7	6	7	7	7	9	6	9	6	6	13	14	12	14	18	19	21	19	17	12	6	5	5	5	5	4	8	9	8	5
Spring																														
Same College	77	83	84	87	83	80	86	82	87	84	75	77	77	77	73	71	70	69	75	77	71	76	80	80	83	82	80	80	84	87
Another	1	1	2	2	4	2	3	1	2	3						1	1	1	1	1	13	10	9	10	9	8	9	5	5	3
Not Attend	21	16	13	11	13	18	11	17	12	13	25	23	23	23	27	28	29	30	24	23	16	13	11	10	8	10	11	15	12	10
Fall (2nd year)																														
Same College	64	68	70	73	71	71	71	66	71	70	57	57	62	63	58	56	50	48	48	51	58	62	63	66	69	67	62	65	71	73
Another	5	4	5	6	7	4	6	5	4	8	3	5	3	4	5	7	6	7	7	7	17	12	16	16	13	14	14	9	6	7
Not Attend	31	28	25	21	22	25	22	29	25	22	40	38	35	33	37	37	44	45	45	41	25	26	21	18	18	19	24	26	23	20
Fall (3rd year)																														
Same College	47	51	49	54	50	51	52	50	52		26	26	27	22	23	23	23	18	23		41	43	48	52	56	50	46	51	57	
Another	10	9	11	11	14	9	10	10	16		8	11	14	18	16	17	14	15	14		22	19	23	20	17	22	19	15	13	
Not Attend	43	41	40	36	36	40	38	40	32		66	63	59	60	61	59	63	67	63		37	38	30	28	27	28	35	34	30	
Fall (4th year)																														
Same College	40	40	41	43	44	40	38	39			4	4	4	7	9	7	8	11			34	38	40	46	47	41	40	45		
Another	11	12	11	12	15	13	14	17			10	13	16	17	14	19	19	15			22	19	21	21	19	22	22	18		
Not Attend	48	48	48	45	41	47	48	43			86	82	79	75	73	74	74	74			44	43	39	33	34	37	38	37		
Fall (5th year)																														
Same College	20	17	14	15	15	13	15				3	3	3	3	4	3	4				12	14	16	16	16	18	17			
Another	10	10	10	9	10	12	12				7	9	11	12	11	14	14				15	14	13	17	15	19	18			
Not Attend	70	74	75	76	75	75	73				90	88	86	85	84	83	82				73	72	71	66	70	63	65			

COLLEGE	CLA										ALL UNIVERSITY									
Freshmen	1964	-65	-66	-67	-68	-69	-70	-71	-72	-73	1964	-65	-66	-67	-68	-69	-70	-71	-72	-73
Fall (total number)	4253	4452	4483	4314	4353	3965	3810	3745	3406	3232	9081	9678	9101	8675	8550	8468	8493	7873	7637	7439
Winter (percentages)																				
Same College	92	92	91	91	90	89	90	90	91	93	91	91	91	90	89	89	89	89	90	92
Another	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Not Attend	7	7	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	7	8	8	8	9	10	10	9	10	9	7
Spring																				
Same College	82	84	84	84	85	82	83	82	85	85	82	80	83	83	83	81	82	81	83	84
Another	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1
Not Attend	17	14	15	14	14	16	16	16	14	15	16	18	15	15	15	17	16	18	16	17
Fall (2nd year)																				
Same College	62	67	69	68	70	69	66	64	67	67	64	61	67	67	67	68	63	63	64	62
Another	7	5	5	5	4	6	5	6	5	6	6	7	6	6	5	7	7	6	5	6
Not Attend	31	27	26	27	26	26	29	31	27	27	30	32	27	27	27	26	30	31	30	31
Fall (3rd year)																				
Same College	36	41	42	41	42	40	37	39	42		40	36	41	41	42	40	38	38	39	
Another	17	18	17	18	18	19	17	17	19		14	15	16	16	16	16	15	15	16	
Not attend	47	42	41	41	41	41	46	44	40		46	50	43	43	42	44	47	48	46	
Fall (4th year)																				
Same College	26	30	31	26	29	30	29	29			29	25	30	31	31	30	29	29		
Another	19	21	20	22	22	22	21	23			17	16	17	18	19	18	18	18		
Not Attend	55	49	49	49	48	48	50	48			55	59	53	51	51	52	53	53		
Fall (5th year)																				
Same College	11	12	13	13	12	13	14				12	10	12	12	12	12	12			
Another	11	12	12	11	13	14	14				10	10	11	11	11	13	13			
Not Attend	78	76	75	75	75	73	72				78	80	77	77	77	75	75			

Same College: registration in same college unit

Another: registration in another college of U of M

Not Attend: no registration at U of M, registration at some other institution possible

CLA: College of Liberal Arts

AFNR: College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Home Economics

General: General College

IT: Institute of Technology

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Table 2

Variation in Graduation Rates According to Selectivity of Institutions

Type of Institution	Percentage of students graduating within 4 years at initial institution	Percentage graduating within 10 years at some institution	Percentage of all 1st time, full-time enrollees, fall 1969
Fifteen most selective private universities	80-85	90-95	1
Large state universities	35-45	60-70	15
State colleges	15-25	35-50	21*

* a number of other categories, i.e. "less selective private", and junior colleges have been omitted from this table.

Source: Newman, Frank et al.
Report on Higher Education
U.S. Office of Education, 1971

TABLE II

Entering U of M Freshmen

	In all Colleges Fall 1920	In all Colleges Fall 1932	In SLA Fall 1936	In (IT,SLA,Ag.Ed) Fall 1937	(Ag.Ed,IT,SLA) Fall 1952	(CLA	IT	AFHE Fall 1966	Gen.)*	Total U of M
Number	1657	1662	1608	2144	2450	4483	766	574	1369	9101
Entering Percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
1st yr Q2						92	95	93	88	92
Q3						85	89	86	77	85
Fall year II	63.5	69.5	79.3	67.2		74	79	75	65	73
Fall year III	51.4	59.6	59.6	55.9		59	71	60	43	57
Fall year IV	47.0	51.9		46.3		51	61	52	20	47
Percentage granted degrees in 4 yrs or completion of 4 yrs of college in 4 yrs	24.6	27.3	23.1	27.8						
Enrolled end yr IV but not completing 4 yrs work	19.9	19.0								
Graduated or continuing at end of 4 yrs	44.5	46.3			50.9					
% granted degrees end of 6 yrs			30.2	37.1						
Fall year V						25	29	24	14	23

*These figures represent total number remaining in the university system although they may have transferred to other colleges.

Sources: Keller and Eckert (1950);
Darley, J. G. (1962);
U of M Office of Records and Admissions (n.d.)

SLS/GLH 3/73